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NEWS RELEASE

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Canyon County Horse Contracts West Nile Virus

BOISE, Idaho – The Idaho State Department of Agriculture and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare jointly announce today that a horse in Canyon County has tested positive for the West Nile virus.

"The horse is doing fine and is expected to make a full recovery," stated Dr. Clarence Siroky, ISDA Administrator for the Division of Animal Industries. "The horse was vaccinated last year, and received a booster shot this spring." The preliminary West Nile test was conducted by the Department of Agriculture and confirmed as positive by The National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa. The National Veterinary Services Laboratory is the national reference lab for West Nile virus infections in animals.

West Nile virus is an infection spread by mosquitoes. First discovered in 1999 in the New York City area, the virus has since spread across the country. "We've been preparing for the arrival of this virus and have been involved in a coordinated effort to educate the public to protect the health of Idaho's citizens and animals," stated Pat Takasugi, Director for ISDA. "This case is an example of the process working; precautions were put into practice and immediate steps were taken."

People and animals are generally infected through the bite of an infected mosquito. "Most people infected with West Nile virus will not realize they have contracted the virus or will only have a mild flu-like illness," says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Idaho Deputy State Epidemiologist. "But the virus can lead to serious illness." She says people of any age can contract the virus, but the illness can be more serious for people over the age of 50. Common symptoms of infection include headaches, body aches and a mild fever.

"We know from this case that West Nile Virus is now present in our state, and we encourage people to fight the bite and take appropriate precautions to protect themselves and their families from infection," Tengelsen says. "This case was discovered in southwest Idaho, but people throughout the state should realize the virus may be present in their communities."

She advises people to insect proof their homes and reduce standing water on their property that might provide breeding habitat for mosquitoes. Other tips include:

- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children.
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk.
- Empty birdbaths and clean decorative ponds every 3-6 days.
- Report dead birds to your local District Health Department or Fish and Game office.

A vaccine is not available for people, but one is available for horses. The most common sign of WNV in horses is weakness, usually in the hindquarters. Weakness may be indicated by a widened

stance, stumbling, leaning to one side and toe dragging. In extreme cases, paralysis may follow. Approximately one-third of unvaccinated horses that show signs of the illness will die. "We encourage horse owners to contact their veterinarian and protect their animals through vaccination," stated Dr. Siroky. "This horse exhibited mild symptoms of this disease, and a veterinarian was contacted immediately. The vaccine may have saved the horse from a more serious illness."

For health information about West Nile virus, please contact your district health department, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, or Health and Welfare's web site at: www2.state.id.us/dhw/. For information about protecting your horse, you can contact your local veterinarian, or visit the Department of Agriculture web site at: www.agri.idaho.gov.

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